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Coin of the Month

YEAR ONE SHEKEL



The silver shekels, struck during the First Revolt (66-70 A.D.) against Rome, were the first silver coins produced by the Jewish State. The silver was obtained by melting down the shekels of Tyre held in the Temple Treasury (note that shekels of Tyre were previously the *only* coins accepted as payment of Temple taxes).

There are several interesting, though as yet unexplained differences between the Jewish shekels struck in the first year of the revolt, and those produced in the following four years. The vessel is shown here with two pearls, one on each side; subsequently a pearl-rimmed vessel is depicted. The reverse inscription was originally "Jerusalem is Holy," but was changed to "Jerusalem the Holy" in the following year.

An "aleph" appears above the vessel, representing the first year of the revolt. In subsequent years letters are shown *preceded* by a "shin," evidently in abbreviation of "shenat," the Hebrew word for year.

The Year One Shekels are made with less skill than those of years 2—5. Obviously the Jewish minters had to refine their methods, for previously they only produced the small crude bronze "mites."

Special thanks to Robert Webber for the fine slide.

Biblical Numystery No. Seven

A TALE OF TWO VESSELS

Many scholars have voiced their opinions concerning the nature of the vessel depicted on the famous Jewish Shekels struck from 66-70 A.D. Generally the vessel is referred to as a chalice, but surprisingly two of the most convincing arguments point not to a drinking cup but rather to either a large ceremonial washing basin (Wirgin) or a gold mixing bowl (Klimowsky). Both objects are known to have been in the great Temple in Jerusalem.

Wolf Wirgin, now a member of the Biblical Numismatic Society, wrote in his controversial *History of Coins and Symbols in Ancient Israel* (Exposition Press, New York, 1958),

"With a little numismatic detective work, let us see what we can do about an object which is frequently mentioned in the Bible and the Talmud, namely the Temple *laver*. No details about its shape and directions for its construction are given. What we do know about it is summarized in Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible:

'Between the altar . . . and the tabernacle stood the laver of bronze . . . to the description of which only a few words are devoted, and these few are found not in the main body of the Priestly Narrative, but in a section bearing internal evidence of a later origin. Beyond the fact that it was a large basin of bronze, and stood upon a base of the same material, we know nothing of its workmanship or ornamentation. It served to hold the water required for the ablutions of the priests in the course of their ministrations, and it is frequently mentioned in the secondary strata of the priestly legislation.'

Though the records do not tell much about the laver, or wash basin, in this case coins come to our aid. First, it is fair to make the assumption that the reason the Bible spends a great deal of description on some objects is that they were unusual and striking in shape and general design. Because they were different from other specimens of their kind, they required a careful description by the ancient chroniclers. On the other hand, those objects that received only brief mention were

probably similar in every way to the pattern of other pieces of their kind which could be found in everyday use. Perhaps for some utensils definite or special construction and ornamentation were prescribed for religious rites, while other objects required no specifications.

Recent opinion has it that the vessel on the shekel actually is a chalice. This opinion is based on two mistaken notions. One comes as the result of an optical illusion, since the size of the vessel cannot be properly determined from viewing it on a coin. The casual observer might very understandably suppose it to be a chalice of table-use size, possibly a little more heavy than a wine glass of large proportions. That this is a wrong conclusion can be seen from the proportion on the bronze coin of Anazarbus. There we observe that the basin reaches the waistline of a man; still, the size of the drawing on this coin is about the same as on the Jewish coin. Another point of interest is that on both coins the shape of the base of the symbol is similar.



Bronze coin from Anazarbus in Cilicia
from the time of Valerian, 253/4 A.D.

Also it seems quite understandable that the vessel is mistaken as a small chalice because its shape resembles the drinking cups popular throughout many centuries, especially in connection with religious ritual. True, we find also similar shapes among Mycenean pottery; but it should be remembered that in classical antiquity no such vessel was ever used for drinking. The Greeks and those people who were under their cultural influence drank exclusively from either deep or flat double-handled bowls. Furthermore, no such cups can be established as having been used during the religious services in the Temple of Jerusalem, although one would expect an object represented on the shekels to have some reference to religion or religious rites."

However, Dr. Ernst Klimowsky, writing in the Israel Numismatic Journal (Volume II, No. 1-2, 1964), points to a smaller vessel carried on top of the Table of Shewbread (as depicted on the Arch of Titus), claiming that it was the prototype for the Shekel design. Such vessels are first mentioned in the Book of Exodus: "Thou shalt also make a table of shittim wood . . . and thou shalt make the dishes thereof, and spoons thereof, and covers thereof, and bowls thereof, to cover withal: of pure gold shalt thou make them" (Exodus 25:23, 29).

Josephus described the bowls in greater detail: "Of the mixing bowls, two were of gold, having scales in relief from the base to the middle with various stones fastened in the coils" (Antiquities XII, 78).

Klimowsky goes on the conclude that, "The description (of the gold mixing bowls) is strongly supported by the iconographic representation stones, which makes it clear that this vessel was not a drinking cup but a mixing bowl for the libation service. This libation cup contained a ritual liquid, usually wine. Under Talmudic law (Aboda Zarah IV, 8; V, 8) it was forbidden to drink that wine."

Laver? Mixing bowl? Chalice? The vessel on the Shekel remains one of the many as yet unresolved mysteries of ancient numismatics. (Ed.)



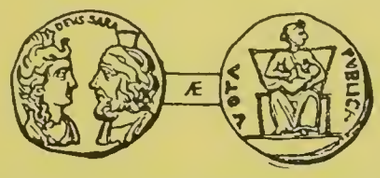
Engraving of the bas relief on the Arch of Titus
shows vessel (gold mixing bowl?) on the Table of Shewbread being carried by victorious Romans.

RELIGIOUS CHARACTER OF ANCIENT COINS

By Professor J. Zimmerman

GENESIS OF THE MADONNA CULT AND MARIOLATRY

The origin and development of the Madonna of the Christian Church may be traced by means of numismatic evidence, for a number of original and unrevised coins bear the imperishable record, that the Ancients of Egypt and throughout the Roman empire were familiar with the conception and exact title of "Mother of God," and the Madonna, long before their adoption into the Church cult of the Christian Church. The form and figure of the Egyptian and Roman Madonna—of the goddess or mother god Isis suckling her child Horus—appears on the coins of different emperors, and the larger illustration that I give is



BUSTS OF ISIS AND SERAPIS WITH INSCRIPTION, DEUS SARA. ON REVERSE, ISIS SUCKLING HORUS. ISSUED UNDER REIGN OF JULIAN



ISIS SUCKLING HORUS. A LARGE BRONZE OF ANTONINUS PIUS, ISSUED IN EGYPT

from a coin of Antoninus Pius. Isis was the great goddess of the Egyptians, and was universally worshipped by them as the highest type of motherhood as well as the faithful wife, and in these attributes she was far superior to the Phrygian mother god Cybele, whom she resembled in some other respects. Whilst the mother goddess Isis was chief among the divinities of Egypt, her cult extended throughout the Roman empire, and so popular did it become that not only did emperors worship at her shrines, but several erected temples and even administered at her altars, and some therefore conclude that its influence had much to do in the enthronement of the Virgin Mary as the Mother of God, and in introducing the cult of the Madonna in the Christian Church, for the worship of Isis, which had been brought to Rome at the close of the third century B.C., had become supreme in Italy as the mother god, in the home where the later Madonna was developed in



THE MOTHER GODDESS CYBELE

the Church. So striking is the resemblance between the latter Madonna and the original Isis, that this subsequent one appears to be merely the Egyptian mother goddess Isis renamed, for it has no early historical antecedents for its origin, but appears to have sprung full grown from Isis, for their form is so much alike that the uninitiated have at times been deceived.

Cybele, the great Phrygian goddess, also appears on numerous Greek and Roman coins, for her worship was prominent among the people of Asia Minor, as we learn from numismatic records, where she is designated either as Mater Deum, mother of gods, or Magna Deum Mater, the Great Mother of Gods, as seen in the accompanying illustration. Lest I should seem to stand alone and to be without historic warrant in drawing my conclusions from this evidence from the coins, I would refer the reader to the greatest authority on Asia Minor, and who reaches a similar conclusion based upon a most exhaustive study of recent discoveries in that country. Sir William H. Ramsay, speaking in reference to early Anatolian Christianity and its indebtedness to the pagan mother goddess worshipped in Lycaonia before the advent of Christianity states "that it was undoubtedly true that this Virgin worship or Mariolatry was to be found in Asia Minor at a very early date, and that, indeed, it was at an Ephesian Council that it became part of the dogma of the Church. It was interesting to observe that there was, too, in Anatolia, a pilgrimage in honour of the Virgin Mother of God which was actually made to an ancient shrine of Artemis the great goddess, and that this pilgrimage continued even after the population had ceased to be definitely Christian. But the doctrine of the θεότοκος was more widely spread, indeed, part of the humanizing influence of religion in almost all countries. In the Christian Churches its influence was of varying strength. In regard to the actual origin of the belief and doctrine, he thought that Egypt contended with Anatolia for first place." It seems to have been only by a natural process of development that the Isis cult became transformed into that of the Virgin Mary, and thus she became enthroned to the supreme place in the Church at a later period, that her pagan predecessor once occupied in the pantheon of Egypt; for no such attributes nor exaltation are ascribed to her in the New Testament, and hence the cult of Mariolatry must be traced to a different source than that of the divine records, and the analogy to the pagan goddesses is so striking, and the evidences are so abundant, that we need not hesitate to recognize in this Christian cult, the transfer or evolution of Isis, with the possible influence at the same time of the Phrygian Cybele.

TURNING OVER A NEW THEORY

By DAVID HENDIN

Some months ago I submitted an article to *The Numismatic Review* concerning the possibility that we have been looking upside down at the reverse of the silver shekels and half-shekels of the First Jewish War Against Rome (66-70 A.D.)

Coincidentally, the very week that the article was published we received two dinner guests at our home: Dr. Ya'akov Meshorer, chief curator of the Bronfman Archaeological Museum of Israel Museum in Jerusalem; and distinguished Israeli numismatist Shraga Qedar.

The article about the possibility of the upside-down shekel became the subject of an animated dinner conversation.

Both Meshorer and Qedar said that they believed that there was an inconsistency in the way we were looking at many of the ancient Jewish coins. But turning the reverse of the shekels upside down was not the only way to solve the problem.

Perhaps, they said, the bunches of grapes and the vine leaves on the coins of the First Jewish War and of the Bar Kochba War should in fact be looked at "upside down," but the pomegranates on the shekels should be looked at "right side up." This would give a consistency to both the axis of the coins as well as the locations and directions of the inscriptions.

This idea was also recently put forth independently by Mel Wacks in the newletter of the Biblical Numismatic Society.

The proposal, then, is that the pomegranates on the reverse of the Jewish Shekels have been looked at correctly all along. *However*, some of the other coins were looked at topsy-turvy.

I have no problem with this theory, since the end result is similar to the one I was trying to achieve with my little article in the Numismatic Review - a consistency in the coins of the two Jewish Wars.

I must admit, though, it is a bit disorienting to look at bunches of grapes and vine leaves on tendrils hanging upside down. On the other hand, we have already begun to adjust to the proveable fact that the anchors on the coins of Alexander Jannaeus were intended to stand upside down.

Indeed, there is much to be said for the possibility that in ancient times people did not look at coins as "right side up" or "upside down."

We have developed this perception in modern times because we often portray coins in photographic plates or drawings - as two-dimensional objects. It is often difficult for us to keep in mind the fact that they are indeed three-dimensional objects.

One interesting possibility that developed in my conversation with the two Israeli numismatists offers a fascinating idea: In the context of the Temple services, perhaps some of the agricultural objects depicted were intended to represent some kind of an offering related to the Temple. If this is the case then one could, for example, look at a coin as if it were a tray with a bunch of grapes laid upon it. This may be similar to the way in which certain offerings were presented in the Temple before it was destroyed, and this may well be an image that Bar Kochba was trying to retain on his coins, along with the images of other Temple implements.

It is even more plausible when one considers that the most common devices shown on the coins of the two Jewish Wars are Temple implements including amphorae, jugs, chalices, trumpets and lyres. The agricultural objects include palm branches (iulabs) and etrogs as well as the grape bunches and vine leaves.

The entire issue is very interesting. But even more exciting is the dialogue in Biblical numismatics that has arisen recently in the United States. This speaks very well of our hobby as well as its outspoken proponents such as Ed Janis, Mel Wacks, Herb Kreindler and Fred Jacobs who are ready to devote their time and energy to research and dissemination of information.

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OLD ACCEPTED WAY TO LOOK AT COINS



First Revolt Shekel



Jannaeus Prutah



First Revolt Prutah



Second Revolt Bronze



Second Revolt Denarius

NEWLY PROPOSED WAY
(According to article by Mel Wacks, Augur p. 101)



(No change)







